

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 0399

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT EC
SUBJ: SCRAMBLE FOR NATIONAL FRONT PRESIDENTIAL BID

REF: QUITO 0330

1. FOLLOWING THE COMPLETION OF THE REFERENDUM, PRESIDENTIAL POLITICS IS GATHERING STEAM. MOST NOTABLY, THE COMPETITION TO BE THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE OF THE NATIONAL CONSTITUTIONALIST FRONT (NCF) POLITICAL COALITION IS HEATING UP. THE CANDIDATE OF THE FRONT (COMPOSED OF THE LIBERAL, CONSERVATIVE, AND NINE SMALLER PARTIES) IS EXPECTED TO HAVE THE BEST POSSIBILITY OF DEFEATING ASSAD BUCARAM, THE CURRENT FRONT RUNNER.

2. THE NCF HAS BEEN MEETING IN QUITO THE LAST TWO DAYS, ALTHOUGH IT HAS ANNOUNCED THAT IT WILL CONCENTRATE ON OTHER POLITICAL QUESTIONS AND LEAVE THE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES UNTIL LATER, IT APPEARS THAT THE SOMETIMES HEATED DISCUSSIONS DEALT LARGELY WITH THE QUESTION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. ACCORDING TO REPORTS, THE MEETINGS' PARTICIPANTS AGREED TO A MEETING OF RAUL CLMENTE HUERTA, SIXTO DURAN-BALLE, JAIME ACOSTA VELASCO AND FRANCISCO HUERTA, ALL OF WHOM ARE POTENTIAL CANDIDATES, TO DISCUSS THE NOMINATION.
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3. THE CURRENT TENSION IN THE COALITION APPEARS TO DERIVE FROM THE COMPETING INTERESTS OF QUITO MAYOR SIXTO-DURAN AND LIBERAL PARTY DIRECTOR FRANCISCO HUERTA. HUERTA IS ADVANCING THE THESIS THAT THE LIBERALS, AS THE LARGEST PARTY IN THE COALITION, SHOULD NOMINATE THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FROM THEIR OWN RANKS. HOWEVER,

DURAN-BALLEN HAS GAINED MOMENTUM AND IS VIEWED BY MANY WITHIN THE FRON AS HAVING THE BEST POSSIBILITY OF BEATING BUCARAM. DURAN-BALLEN HAS REPORTEDLY ALREADY REJECTED THE POSSIBILITY OF RUNNING AS VICE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WITH A LIBERAL PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE.

4. COMMENT: IF THE NCF IS TO SURVIVE, THERE WILL SOON HAVE TO BE AN AGREEMENT ON THE QUESTION OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE. HUERTA IS HOPING TO MAINTAIN LIBERAL PARTY PRIMACY IN THE FRONT FOR REASONS RELATED TO HIS PERCEPTIONS OF LIBRAL PARTY INTERESTS AS WELL AS FOR HIS OWN POLITICAL AMBITIONS. HE IS RELUCTANT TO SUPPORT A NON-LIBERAL PARTY CANDIDATE BECAUSE THIS WILL MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO MOBILIZE THE PARTY IN ORDER TO DEFEND ITSELF AGAINST LIBERAL MAVERICKS LIKE RODRIGO BORJA AND ABDON CALDERON. OTHER COALITION MEMBERS EITHER HAVE THEIR OWN AMBITIONS (E.G., JAIME ACOSTA) OR REGARD DURAN-BALLEN AS THE ONLY CANDIDATE WITH SERIOUS POSSIBILITIES OF HANDING BUCARAM A DEFEAT AT THE POLLS. PERCEIVING HIS OWN STRENGTH, DURAN-BALLEN IS NOT LIKELY TO WILLINGLY STEP ASIDE IN FAVOR OF A LIBERAL CANDIDATE. IN VIEW OF THE MOMENTUM THAT DURAN'S CANDIDACY HAS BEEN ACCUMULATING FRANCISCO HUERTA WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO SURRENDER TO FORCE MAJEURE AND ACCEPT DURAN-BALLEN OR SEE THE NCF FALL APART.
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